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Western Europe  
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# Transnational Senegalese Politics in France

Muslim brotherhoods (*turuq*), most notably the Mourides, have been considered a dominant factor of political influence at the local and national levels in Senegal. The recent election campaigns, however, seem to indicate a changing influence of religious authorities on a local level. Most of the opposition parties formed a coalition which intended to break up the dominance of the Socialist Party, an intention which was successfully realized. International political – not necessarily homogeneous religious – networks and new means of communication were decisive for the victory of the new president, Abdoulaye Wade, in 2001.

From the colonization period up to the 1990s, a large number of national and local religious authorities considerably supported the ruling government in Senegal by guaranteeing the French governor's control over rural areas or by expressing clear recommendations to the voters after the independence. Nevertheless, the mutual loyalty of the secular and the religious powers has not always functioned without resistance. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French governor Faidherbe, who counted on the purchased loyalty of local marabouts in order to control rural areas, was fought by El Haj Oumar. Senegal's first president after the independence, Léopold Sédar Senghor (who was Catholic), continued to cooperate with the authorities of the leading Sufi brotherhood. The exchange of material and immaterial goods could be proceeded with by the purchase of votes against land rights or tax advantages for the marabouts. Senghor's successor, Abdou Diouf, whose family belongs to the *tariqa* Tijaniyya, dealt also with the Mouride and the Tijaniyy marabouts, particularly with the general caliph of the Tijaniyya, Abdoul Aziz Sy (1905–1997). These links were visible on a symbolic level, when representatives of the Senegalese government assisted at national or regional pilgrimages (the Tijaniyy Gamou in Tivavouane or the Mouride Magal in Touba), or when the drainage system was renewed and maintained by important public funding because of the event.<sup>1</sup> The ruling Mouride general caliph Serigne Saliou Mbacké presented himself until the end of the 1990s as a discrete religious authority not wanting to get involved in political af-

fairs. Hence at that time, the leading candidate of the opposition party, Abdoulaye Wade, visiting the Mouride capital Touba very frequently, openly showed his need for the protection and counsel of his personal Mouride marabout.

## Re-privatization of religion

During the presidential election campaign in 2000, the behaviour of most of the local and national religious authorities changed significantly. Marabouts tended to avoid expressing themselves in favour of either the ruling socialist party or for the opposition parties. There was only the general caliph of the Tijaniyya, Mansour Sy, who appealed to believers to vote for Diouf. However, Diouf was defeated even in Sy's own electoral circumscription in the holy city of the Tijaniyya, Tivavouane. The large coalition of the opposition parties, named 'Alternance 2000', won the presidential elections, resulting in the victory of the Mouride Abdoulaye Wade as the first non-socialist president after 40 years. Although Wade belongs to the liberal PDS (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais), former Marxist parties like And Jéf/PADS and socialist dissidents like Ibrahima Niassé joined the coalition in order to break the 20-year domination of Abdou Diouf.

The first act of the new president just after his victory was a personal pilgrimage to his marabout in Touba, in order to thank him for support and prayer. Serigne Saliou Mbacké had refused to openly express himself for Wade, but the fact that Wade presented himself always as a Mouride *talibé* no doubt had a positive effect on his election. But the links between religious and political authorities at the micro and the macro levels are far more complex, and we need to enlarge the general context of these elections in order to understand Wade's success.

## Transnational networks

Studies on Senegalese migration have heavily focused on Mouride trade networks.<sup>2</sup> The increasing migration of Senegalese peasants to the urban areas and the international migration to Europe (France, Italy, Spain and Germany) and, currently, to the United States (especially New York), have reinforced the creation of transnational social spaces. The latter are not necessarily exclusively based on religious practices or on membership in a *dahira*. Communities have cross-cutting ties and individuals belong to several networks and (interest) groups at once. It is sure that the Mouride economic networks are some of the best organized groups with an undoubted financial influence. Nevertheless, we have observed that individual and collective migrants' activities in migration, particularly in and around Paris, considerably focus on the will for political change. The large political coalition that aimed at breaking the domination of President Abdou Diouf was united above religious or ideological orientations. During the electoral meetings in Paris, for example, financial affairs were controlled by three women: one Mouride and one Catholic woman who belong to the main

opposition party PDS, and one Tijaniyy woman who is a member of the former Marxist party And Jéf/PADS. This example reflects the attitude of most of the activists as well of most of the voters. Religious issues were not openly discussed during the meetings in and around Paris – on the contrary, the laic character of the constitution was underlined several times by speakers. Nevertheless, most of the practising Mourides were conscious of the fact that in the person of Abdoulaye Wade, a Mouride *talibé* was leading the main opposition party. In the past, several marabouts got into trouble for having supported the government – a government which has been increasingly contested. The dissatisfaction with the ruling government and the difficult economic situation of the population since the devaluation of the Franc CFA in 1994 have increased the will for political change, particularly among the youth, whose participation rate in elections was very low until 2000. Hence, it became a growing risk for marabouts to openly support the ruling government by the expression of *ndigals* (which means a general order, in this case a clear recommendation for a vote). A member of the Senate, the second chamber in Senegal, proudly said during a meeting (in France) of the opposition: 'I have convinced my marabout not to give any *ndigal*, although he usually supported the Socialist Party.' This statement was met with applause, reflecting a belief in the real chance of political change. We can assume that historical structures of religious authority were largely contested on an individual level. People's will to take autonomous political decisions, independently from the advice of marabouts, was obvious. This evolution was the fruitful ground for Abdoulaye Wade's strategy to count on transnational networks. Wade himself organized his political campaign from his residence in Versailles near Paris. Political claims of the migrants constituted the central part of his political programme: a favourite customs policy, governmental aid for investments in Senegal, bilateral social insurance agreements, human living conditions for migrants in France, etc. Wade systematically addressed the migrants during electoral meetings that were organized in the collective workers' homes in and around Paris. He presented himself as the only candidate who is close to the migrants and who best knows their problems.

## Migrants as vote multipliers

The central reason for this election campaign outside of Senegal was the importance of the migrants as new intermediaries between the political leaders and the voters in Senegal, especially in rural areas, where religious authorities have played the role of counsellors in electoral affairs for a long time. In Paris, at the end of the official campaign on Friday night before the elections, several speakers urged the activists present to influence their relatives and friends in Senegal: 'The campaign is officially closed, but it is not forbidden to phone home.' This

strategy worked also in Senegal, where people from Dakar came to visit their family before the day of elections in order to convince them to choose Wade. Abdou Diouf, who was conscious of the importance of the opposition parties in urban areas, scheduled the elections during the Aid feast, hoping that people from Dakar or other cities would celebrate the Aid in their home villages instead of voting in the city. This plan failed, as residents of the big cities organized themselves very well in order to be back in town in time. Ultimately their presence in rural areas was favourable for the opposition. Wade's strategy of multiplying votes from migrants back to Senegal and from the cities back to the village was very successful. Another important aspect was the growing speed of communication thanks to new media and to mobile phones. The private press company Sudonline published the main opposition journal *Sud Quotidien* online, so that Senegalese abroad were very well informed about the political and economic situation at home – particularly about the corruption scandals in which members of the socialist government were implicated. In Paris, the printed version of the online journal circulated amongst migrants who, in majority, have no access to Internet. Another important factor for Wade's victory in 2000 was the efficient survey of the elections by journalists who assisted at the counting of the votes, and communicated the results via mobile phones to the private radio station of the 'Sud' group. The mirror effect continued via satellite radios which spread the results in Paris. Senegalese migrants celebrated Wade's victory in the suburbs of the French capital as well as in Dakar even before the government had time to officially count the votes.

## Notes

1. Leonardo A. Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
2. See the recent articles by Sophie Bava, 'The Mouride Dahira between Marseille and Touba', *ISIM Newsletter* 8 (2001), and by Serigne Mansour Tall, 'Mouride Migration and Financing', *ISIM Newsletter* 9 (2002).

Monika Salzbrunn recently defended her Ph.D. in sociology and social anthropology at the EHESS, Paris, and the University of Bielefeld. Her research focuses on 'Transnational Politics of West African Muslim Migrants in France and Germany'.  
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The opposition party's victory was celebrated by Senegalese residents of France. This poster is an announcement of the party.

